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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Tuesday, October 29, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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In this week's mail comes the story of a sad experience in washing blankets.

Says the letter: "I have recently washed 3 woolen blankets in the same way, and in the same machine, that I have laundered them several times before. I have always prided myself on doing them so nicely. I washed each one separately, but used the same water for all 3. The first turned out beautifully. While washing the second one, I was interrupted and I let the washer go longer than I should have. Then I turned it off, but let the blanket stay in the water until I finished with my caller. When I took it out it was hard, very hard, and shapeless and terribly shrunk. I put the third blanket in next and that came out very well. It wasn't the temperature of the water, for the two that went in the hottest and the coolest water came out fine. Can you account for the failure, and can I do anything about it? Would doing it over help?"

Unfortunately, this is a common household experience, so the textile experts of the Bureau of Home Economics tell me. Too long soaking, and more especially the action of the washing machine, if continued too long, is very likely to shrink or "felt" a blanket. So, if you are interrupted in a job like this, better let your visitor wait while you finish the blanket, or at least until you can take it out of the water and the machine.

The worst of it is that once the blanket shrinks and becomes hard this way you can do very little about it. Sometimes, by washing it again in a heavy lukewarm suds of some mild soap, you can improve it a little, if you brush it as it dries and soften it with your hands. But wool is an animal fiber, and after it once becomes hard, you can't do much to soften it.

The next question touches some fine points in egg cookery. It really is 4 or 5 questions about one thing -- meringue. "Should the egg whites be cold or warm when you beat them? Should the meringue go on a hot or a cold pie filling? What causes watery meringue? And what is the right amount of sugar to use?"

It takes a chemist as well as a cook to answer those questions, so I have consulted Dr. Florence King in the Bureau of Home Economics who knows the chemistry of cooking as well as the practical side of it.

She says, for best results with a meringue, have the eggs warm -- that is, about room temperature. That may surprise you. I am sure I have been told, all my life, that eggs should be cold when you beat them. But the latest teaching on that subject is that when egg whites are cold they do not beat up so readily or make so much foam as when they are warm. That sounds reasonable, when you come to think of it. Warm things are likely to stretch or expand more than cold ones. The chemists explain it by saying that the surface tension of the egg white is less when the egg is warm, and the white expands more easily then. So, if you are using eggs from a refrigerator, take them out an hour or so before you intend to make your meringue and they will beat up more quickly and give you more foam.

The next point also has to do with temperature. When you spread the meringue on the pie, have the pie filling at least warm, and put the pie in the oven immediately. In other words, see that your beaten egg white begins to cook before it has a chance to separate, as it would do if you let it stand. But if you put it in the oven, the warm pie underneath and the hot air around it will prevent the separation. But be sure the oven is not too hot -- not more than moderate, that is about 325 degrees Fahrenheit. If you have the oven too hot, the meringue will brown and harden quickly on the outside but the inside will separate, become watery, and fall.

So there you have an answer to the next question, "What causes a watery meringue?" The cause is separation of the egg white, and this will happen when the foam stands cold. It will also happen when the meringue is browned too fast.

Another thing that may happen to a meringue is caused by too much sugar, and that brings me to the fourth and last question, "How much sugar should you use?" One or 2 tablespoons of sugar to 1 egg white is enough. With more sugar, the meringue will brown too quickly, even in a moderate oven, and the thick sugar sirup will ooze out in drops, as the meringue cooks and shrinks.

Another question in this week's mail brings up a familiar problem. This letter says: "I have my jellies in the cellar, but the room is damp, and now I find the glasses covered with dots of mold. Will this hurt the jelly?"

Those dots of mold are due to the dampness of the cellar. So move the jelly at once to a dry place. Then scrape the mold off and wash the glass thoroughly with hot water. Dampness caused the mold to grow, but it had to have something to grow on -- a little sugar or fruit juice probably, left on the outside of the glass when the jelly was put up.

Will the mold harm the jelly itself? Not if it is only on the outside of the glass. But if it has got in under the paraffin and gone deep enough, it may spoil the flavor of the jelly. If you find only a little layer of mold under the paraffin, take off the paraffin, scrape the mold off the jelly, wipe the glass clean above the jelly, and seal it again with fresh paraffin. To wipe the glass clean and dry, use hot water or a little alcohol on a bit of clean cloth. In any case, wash off the outside of the jelly glasses thoroughly, and move them all to a dry place.

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